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EVIDENCES
OF
REVEALED RELIGION,
AND PARTICULARLY
CHRISTIANITY,
STATED,
With reference to a PAMPHLET called
The AGE of REASON;
IN A DISCOURSE
Delivered at the CHAPEL in LEWIN'S-MEAD,
BRISTOL,
DECEMBER 25, 1795.
And, with Omissions, in ESSEX-STREET, LONDON,
JANUARY 17, 1796.

By JOHN PRIOR ESTLIN. *K*

Blame not before thou hast examined the truth:
understand first and then rebuke.

Jesus, Son of Syrach.

Εοικεν εκ αληθως αλλα φιλαπεχθημονως ταυτα λεγειν
σκοπον εχων κατηγορησαι της αρχης τε Χριστιανισμου
ηρτημενης απο Ιουδαιων.

Origen. contra Cels. Lib. 1.

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Bristol:

Printed by N. BIGGS, St. Augustine's,  
And sold by Mrs. LLOYD, Mr. COTTLE, and the other  
Booksellers in Bristol; and by Mr. JOHNSON,  
St. Paul's Church-Yard, London.





TO THE  
**REV<sup>D</sup>. JOHN PRIOR, B. D.**  
VICAR OF  
ASHBY-DE-LA-ZOUCH, AND OF PACKINGTON,  
*IN LEICESTERSHIRE,*  
IN TESTIMONY OF  
HIGH RESPECT AND SINCERE ESTEEM  
*FOR HIS CHARACTER,*  
AND OF  
PERMANENT GRATITUDE  
FOR  
THE BENEFITS OF HIS INSTRUCTION,  
AND IN  
PERFECT CONFIDENCE,  
UNDER EVERY DIFFERENCE OF OPINION  
(WHICH HOWEVER HAS NO PLACE RESPECTING THE  
EVIDENCE, DUTIES AND IMPORTANCE  
*OF CHRISTIANITY,*)  
OF HIS CONTINUED FAVOUR AND FRIENDSHIP,  
**THIS DISCOURSE,**  
PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF A CONGREGATION  
AS DESERVEDLY, AS CORDIALLY BELOVED,  
IS INSCRIBED,  
*BY HIS OBLIGED SERVANT,*  
*AND AFFECTIONATE KINSMAN,*

**JOHN PRIOR ESTLIN.**

BRISTOL, FEB. 12, 1796.





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1 PETER, iii. 15.

*Be ready always to give an answer to every man  
that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in  
you, with meekness and fear.*

WITH meekness and fear—or with mildness and diffidence, in opposition to a petulant, dogmatical, and conceited spirit—will a person whose ruling principle is a love of truth, and who is anxious to promote its general reception in the world, from a conviction of its importance to human happiness, be always ready, on every subject, and particularly on the subject of religion, to exhibit the grounds of those opinions which he has embraced himself, and to propose his objections, to what he conceives to be the erroneous and false opinions of others. And it is a strong internal argument of the truth of the christian religion, and a circumstance which strikingly distinguishes it from every species of imposture, that in the conduct of the understanding in the pursuit of truth,

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it recommends the utmost freedom of investigation, impartiality and diligence, and then addresses itself to the reason and judgment of mankind in favour of its own pretensions.— Both our Saviour and his apostles always discountenance a rash and hasty belief. They never make any other appeal than to the understandings of men, considering them always as reasonable beings, as accountable to God for the use of their rational as well as moral powers, and commending them highly for trying and examining those doctrines which were submitted to their consideration. *Why even of yourselves*, says our Saviour, *judge ye not what is right? I speak as unto wise men*, says the apostle Paul, *judge ye what I say*. And again, *prove all things, hold fast that which is good*. When the apostle would persuade the Jews that Jesus was the Christ, *he reasoned with them out of the Scriptures*, opening and alleging from them, *that Christ must needs have suffered and risen from the dead, and that Jesus, whom he preached unto them, was the Christ*. Hence the Bereans are highly commended by the apostle, not only for the fair and candid hearing which they gave to the things which he taught, but for the care which they took to satisfy themselves of the truth of them. *These were*



were more noble, says he, *than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word, that is, allowed it to be preached to them, with all readiness of mind, and after that, searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so.* If this be the spirit with which we should examine the evidences of christianity; if this be the spirit with which it should be proposed to the reception of mankind; this is likewise the spirit with which it should be attacked.

A love of truth is the fairest character of man. Wherever it appears, whether in a friend or a foe, let it receive its merited applause. Let every subject be discussed; let every difficulty be urged and examined; let every opinion be fairly and honestly proposed. Truth has nothing to fear but from darkness and concealment. I censure not the man, who after that full and impartial examination of the subject which its importance demands, and which is necessary to form a well-founded judgment, disbelieves christianity. I censure not the man, who tries to make converts to his opinion by writing against it, provided that the only weapons which he makes use of in his attack, be *reason and argument.* From *reason and argument* I am convinced, that the friends of

natural and revealed religion, have nothing to fear. The great and formidable enemy which they have to combat, is *prejudice*. Prejudice has hitherto been in favour of religion, under some form or other. There is reason to apprehend, from a variety of causes which are now operating, that prejudice, with respect to a great part of mankind, will shortly be against it. The human mind naturally flies from one extreme to another; and no quality of intellect is so rare and uncommon, as that philosophical accuracy, that nice discrimination, which can resolve into their first principles ancient prejudices (which it is worthy of observation, though seldom attended to, have generally in their composition some truth mixed with much error,) and at the same time that it rejects the error, can preserve the truth with which it was blended. Instead of this delicate mental operation, which distinguishes the candid, the well disciplined, the comprehensive mind, we generally proceed in a much more summary and easy manner, and reject former opinions altogether. The consequence of this is, we take up another set of prejudices in the room of those which we had dismissed. • And in some future period of time, when the human mind will be restored to its equilibrium, when both extremes



extremes will be viewed with equal impartiality, and perhaps with equal indifference, I doubt not but it will appear, that the prejudices which now prevail, and probably will for some time prevail, in favour of infidelity, are only inferior in strength and degree, to those which have prevailed, during the reign of superstition, in favour of irrational and corrupt systems of religion. In the pursuit of truth, let not the judgment be swayed by authority, and let no names, however sacred, be put in the scale against reason and argument. But, Oh! ye best and wisest men of past ages—ye Miltons, Boyles, Newtons, Lockes and Hartleys of later times—ye best and wisest men that now exist, whose memory science will ever cherish with grateful fondness, shall those opinions, which after the coolest and most impartial examination you adopted, and for which, with the clearest view of the difficulties attending them, you have given the most substantial arguments, be, not only rejected, without examination, but be treated with every possible mark of insult, indignity and contempt? To this circumstance, I imagine the authority of great names will fairly apply. Let their opinions be known before they are rejected; let their arguments be understood before

before they are pronounced of no force. The abuse of *characters*, without a knowledge of those characters, is always considered as the greatest injustice. And is the abuse of *principles*, without a knowledge of those principles, fair and equitable? In medicine, in law, in the mathematics, in languages, in any branch of science or philosophy, the weakness and inconsistency of such a conduct would be immediately apparent. In religion only it is practised; in religion only, it is suffered to pass uncensured.

There is something of a very intoxicating nature in popular applause. The man who has acquired it, by one particular species of excellence, is apt to claim it as his property, and to think, that it will allow him the possession of every other species of excellence. A writer of considerable celebrity in the political world, of a strong and vigorous, but uncultivated understanding; because he has obtained some reputation by his writings on a subject which has employed his attention, has presumed on his competency to discuss the subject of revealed religion, although it is evident, that he is perfectly unacquainted both with its nature and evidence. The pamphlet  
called



called the *Age of Reason*—which I should not have noticed from this place, if I had not been informed that it has made a serious impression upon the minds of many—contains, where it actually attacks revelation, so many assertions, for which there is no foundation, that I am doubtful whether it might not be read with greater improvement, if every affirmative proposition were made a negative one, and every negative one, an affirmation. I confess I do not see what right any person has to abuse Christianity, nor for what it *is*, but for what it *is not*; particularly, when what it is, and what it has been represented to be by those who were best acquainted with its true spirit and genius, might be so easily ascertained. I confess I do not see what *right* any person has to assert as *facts*, things which are *not facts*, particularly when the true state of the case might be known with so little difficulty. Inconsiderate and thoughtless, however, to say the least, as these things are, the *mode of attack* is still more reprehensible. It is not in my power, within the compass of a single discourse, (tho' that will probably be the longest which I ever delivered) to enter into a distinct consideration of all the parts of this singular composition, and I beg you will consider what will now be  
laid

laid before you, as only a concise view of some of the arguments in favour of *revealed religion*, and particularly *Christianity*, with a reference to, and by no means a complete examination of, the pamphlet just mentioned. The difficulty is, out of such a mass of materials, to know what to select, and what to reject. It can be, but comparatively little that at present will be offered to your consideration; but I trust that little will enable those who have seldom attended to the subject before, to understand some of the grounds on which their faith is built, and to be able likewise, to *make an apology*, as it is in the original, to every man who asketh a reason of the hope that is in them; which I presume will always be done by each of us, with meekness and fear.

Previously to the very brief sketch which I shall lay before you of the evidences of Christianity, it may be proper to observe, that *all* which a defender of revealed religion, as such, is obliged to contend for is, *the divine mission of Moses confirmed by miracles*; and *the divine mission of Jesus Christ, confirmed by miracles and by his own resurrection from the dead*. If this had constantly been kept in view, many volumes of theological controversy might have been spared, and many persons might have  
been



been classed with Christians; who have considered themselves, and been considered by the world as unbelievers. The attacks which are made on the outworks will I hope unite all Christians in a strenuous defence of the citadel. Indeed what is attacked is not Christianity. It is an unwieldy, cumbrous dress which has been put on the fairest form that ever was exhibited to the world; a dress which totally conceals her beauties, and which, when it falls off, as it will do by the arrows which were directed at herself, will discover her in all her native charms. To revealed religion as we have defined it, not a single argument brought forward by the author of the age of reason is applicable; and it is a curious circumstance that if every difficulty which he urges were proved, neither the Jewish nor Christian revelation would be affected by it.

But though the divine mission of Moses and of Jesus Christ is all which it is absolutely necessary to contend for, yet I apprehend, upon the surest ground of testimony it is established, that *the scriptures of the old and new testament contain a true and authentic account of these revelations.* The *inspiration* of these books is a circumstance on which it is by no means

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necessary to insist. I scruple not to inform you, that I think the belief of the plenary superintendent inspiration of these writings, has afforded a handle to infidels to cavil at them. If it had been necessary in the first case, it would have been necessary likewise, with respect to all the transcribers and translators of the scriptures. The prophets, I consider, as divinely inspired, when they uttered their predictions; and the writers of the new Testament, I consider as persons who were under the direction of the holy spirit, and endued with a power of working miracles; but there do not appear to me to be any grounds for the supposition, that their inspiration extended to the stile and manner of their narrative.

Many objections which have been made to different parts of the *Jewish* œconomy, seem to be owing to our confining our attention to the perfection of the *author*, without considering the low and imperfect mental state of the *recipients* of this revelation. We expect *absolute*, where we have no right to look for more than a *relative* perfection. Every thing which is valuable in itself seems to be *progressive*. The whole administration of divine providence in this world is evidently a *process*; and those things which



which are most perfect in their kind are the slowest in coming to maturity. If the different periods of the Roman history have been compared to the different periods of human life,\* so in the history of mankind at large, perhaps the patriarchal age may be considered as the infancy; the Jewish as the childhood; the Christian as the youth; and the final prevalence of Christianity, as the mature age of the world. The mode of treating children must be different from that which is adopted to full grown men. The gross conceptions of the Jewish people rendered them incapable of receiving a more pure and spiritual system. But, my friends, we are greatly mistaken, if we suppose that the general spirit of the Jewish law is not kind, gentle and benevolent. If any person will read Lowman on the civil government of the Hebrews, and on the Hebrew worship, he will see that this is its character. Let us only attend to the design and general tendency of such precepts as the following. *Thou shalt not curse the deaf. Thou shalt not kill a cow and her young in one day. Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn; and Cursed is he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way.* The object of these particular

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precepts,

\* Si quis ergo Populum Romanum quasi hominem consideret, totamque ejus aetatem percenseat, quatuor gradus processusque ejus inveniet.—FLORUS.

precepts—that of abstaining from blood and many others of the same character, was to inspire a rude and ignorant people with kind and benevolent general principles. Many of the regulations appear to us trifling, for which there were, doubtless, at that time, good and solid reasons. That, for instance, which *forbids a woman to put on the dress of a man, and a man the dress of a woman*, is one of this description. But we shall see that there was some foundation for it, when we are informed, that “in that country, men worshipped Venus in womens habits, and women in the habits of men. The women likewise put on armour in the worship of Mars.”\* The objection which is made to the extirpation of the Canaanites is indeed of a more serious nature, and strikes at first, every humane and benevolent mind. If it were to be considered as a precedent, or as countenancing such a practice in any other circumstances whatever, I should, without any hesitation, deny that they had a divine command for their conduct, and yet not give up my belief in the divine authority of the Mosaic dispensation. It deserves, however, to be attended to, that this difficulty is not peculiar to revelation. Similar excesses have been committed in every age, and yet the whole world is  
under

\* Lowman.



under the administration of divine providence. The author and giver of life, and he alone has a right to dispose of it as he thinks best. Had this been effected by the instrumentality of natural causes, we should have been disposed to acquiesce in the difficulty. What we cannot comprehend, and many things of this kind there must be, as the human understanding is not infinite, it would be but fair to resolve into our ignorance ; and what, after all, appears to us to be totally irreconcilable with the divine perfections, we may omit, or even reject, without giving up the general system of our belief. But perhaps, (I mention it with some degree of diffidence I acknowledge, as the principle on which the objection is founded is so broad and comprehensive in its nature that there is no other supposable case to which it is inapplicable—perhaps, I say) the idolatry of the Canaanites which was connected with the sacrifice of their children, and with vices which have a tendency to annihilate the whole human race—perhaps *their idolatry, and their vices* rendered this *extraordinary operation* necessary for the future good of the whole world ; and not only necessary in itself, but that it should be performed by the *Jews as instruments*, that they might acquire, not *habits of cruelty and ferocity* which

which *one* act, for *one specific purpose*, and *without their own consent* never could have formed, but of *horror* at the *idolatry* and the *vices*, the dreadful effects of which they had so feelingly witnessed.

There is one difficulty more, with respect to the old testament, which it may be proper just to mention. Did the sun stand still in the days of Joshua, and the moon stay? The most learned of the Jews do not believe that this was the case, but consider it as a poetical and sublime description. As in the song of Deborah, "*they fought from heaven, the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.*"

Besides these *particular* objections, the author of the age of reason, has given us one which is of a more *general* nature.

"Those who have superstitiously boasted of the antiquity of the Bible and particularly of the books ascribed to Moses, have done it without examination, and without any other authority than that of one credulous man telling it to another, for so far as historical and chronological evidence applies, the very first book in the bible is not so ancient as the book of Homer by more  
than



than three hundred years, and is about the same age with Esop's Fables."

This is the information given us by Mr. Paine; the following account we have from Sir Isaac Newton.

"The Book of the Law was preserved and handed down to posterity by the Samaritans; and *therefore* was received by the ten Tribes before their captivity. For when the ten Tribes were captivated, a priest of the captivity was sent back to Bethel, by order of the King of Assyria, to instruct the new inhabitants of Samaria in the manner of the God of the land; and the Samaritans had the Pentateuch from this priest, as containing the law or manner of the God of the land, which he was to teach them. For they persevered in the Religion which he taught them, joining with it the worship of their own Gods; and by persevering in what they had been taught, they preserved this book of the Law in the original character of the Hebrews; while the two Tribes, after their return from Babylon, changed the character to that of the Chaldees, which they had learned at Babylon.

And

And since the Pentateuch was received as the book of the Law both by the two Tribes and by the ten Tribes, it follows as a necessary consequence that they each received it before they became divided into two Kingdoms. For after the division, they received not Laws from each other, but remained in a state of national antipathy to each other. This division took place in the reign of Jeroboam, the successor of Solomon. The Pentateuch therefore was the book of the Law in the days of David and Solomon. The affairs of the tabernacle and temple were ordered by David and Solomon, according to the Law of this book. For in describing how their forefathers kept it not, he quotes many historical things out of the books of Exodus and Numbers.

The race of the Kings of Edom before there reigned any King over Israel, is set down in the book of Genesis; and therefore that book was not written, entirely in the form now extant, before the reign of Saul. The writer set down the race of those Kings until his own time; he therefore wrote after Saul, and before David conquered Edom. The Pentateuch is composed of the Law and the history of God's people together: and the history hath been collected  
from



from several books : such as were the history of the Creation composed by Moses Gen. ii. 4. (the words "these are the generations of the Heavens and the Earth when they were created," meaning that such are the contents of the book of the generations, &c.) and likewise from the book of the generations of Adam quoted Gen. v. 1. and the book of the wars of the Lord quoted in Numb. xxi. 14. This book of wars contained what was done at the Red Sea, and in the journeying of Israel through the Wilderness ; and therefore was begun by Moses : and Joshua might carry it on to the conquest of Canaan. These were public books, and therefore not written without the authority of Moses and Joshua. And Samuel had leisure in the reign of Saul, to put them into the form of the Pentateuch, and the book of Joshua, as now extant : inserting in the book of Genesis, the race of the Kings of Edom, until there reigned a King in Israel. To Samuel the compilation of the book of Judges is to be attributed, and likewise the book of Ruth ; which contains the lives of the ancestors of David ; and was probably written, shortly after David was anointed King. The two books of Samuel were written partly by himself, but the greater part by his disciples,

the prophets of Naioth.\* The books of the Kings and Chronicles were collected out of the historical writings of the ancient Seers and Prophets. The book of Ezra was originally a part of the book of the Chronicles, and has been divided from it. The other historical books were compiled from many and various writings by Ezra: and by Ezra the prophecies were collected. The Psalms, composed by Moses, David, and many others, seem to have been also collected by Ezra. I reckon him to be the collector, because in this collection there are found Psalms written as late as the Babylonian captivity, but none later."

Such is the information given by Sir Isaac Newton, which it would not have been improper for the author of the age of reason to have consulted, before he had given us his opinion concerning the antiquity of the books of the old testament, and concerning Homer and Euclid, and Esther and Ruth, and Dan and the Kings of Edom.

But not to trespass too much on your patience, I proceed to observe, that the credibility of Christianity as a divine revelation, rests upon  
five

\* 1 Sam. xix. 18—20.



five grounds of evidence, each of which, is I trust, independantly sufficient to support it.

The first is, the authenticity of the books of the new testament.

The second is, a multitude of facts which may be shewn to be effects of which *it* is the cause, and which are inexplicable upon any other supposition.

The third is, the completion of prophecies.

The fourth is, the presumptive and collateral evidence.—And,

The last, the internal evidence.

With respect to the first of these, the authenticity of the books of the new testament, it may be expedient, for the sake of those who have not paid much attention to the subject, to produce a few of the testimonies from early christian writers, which have been collected, with so much fidelity, by Dr. Lardner; as the writer I have alluded to has made this assertion, “There was no such book as the new testament till more than three hundred years after the time that Christ is said to have lived.”

In opposition to this most extraordinary assertion, I beg leave to lay before you the following *facts*.

Clement, who is mentioned by St. Paul in the fourth chapter of his epistle to the Philippians, who was bishop of the church at Rome, wrote an epistle (even before the destruction of Jerusalem, for he speaks of the temple-worship as performed at that time,) in the name of the Church over which he presided, to the Church at Corinth—in which are these words; “Take into your hands the epistle of the blessed Paul the Apostle. What did he at first write unto you in the beginning of the Gospel? verily he did, by the spirit, admonish you concerning himself, and *Cephas* and *Apollos*, because that even then you did form *parties*.” He has likewise passages out of the epistle to the Romans, and some other of the apostolical epistles.

And passages out of the gospels of Matthew and Luke, are introduced in this manner. “Let us do as it is written,” and “remembering the words of the Lord Jesus which he spake.”

Ignatius, who was bishop of the Church at Antioch about the year 70, and who, Chrysostom says, had conversed familiarly with the  
Apos-



Apostles, and was perfectly acquainted with their doctrine, suffered martyrdom, as is generally supposed, in the year 107, or about six or seven years after the death of John : for let it be remembered, whilst we are considering these testimonies, that the death of this Apostle did not happen till the year 100 or 101 : Ignatius wrote an epistle to the Ephesians, in which he has several passages out of Paul's epistle to the same people, and plain allusions to the gospels of Matthew and John. And in his epistle to the Philadelphians, are these words ; " Fleeing to the gospel as the flesh of Jesus, and to the Apostles as the presbytery of the Churches. Let us also love the Prophets, because that they also spake of the gospel, and hoped in him (or Christ) and expected him."

Polycarp, a disciple of St. John, and appointed by him, and probably by other Apostles, bishop of the church at Smyrna, in an epistle to the *Philippians*, written about the year 108, " in his own name, and in the name of the presbyters with him," has these words, " For neither I, nor any one like me, can come up to the wisdom of the blessed and renowned Paul, who, when absent, *wrote to you a letter* ; into which if you look, you will be able to certify

tify yourselves in the faith which has been delivered to you." In another chapter, he speaks as plainly of the Apostle's having written to them. He has likewise quotations from five other of Paul's epistles; quotes many of the words of our Lord, which we have in the evangelists, and has plain references to many other books of the new testament. And it is worthy of notice, in reply to an insinuation of the deistical writers, respecting apocryphal books, made without due examination, that in these apostolical fathers as they are called, because they lived in the times of the apostles, there are *no quotations* from any apocryphal books concerning the history, or doctrines of Christ and his Apostles.

An epistle from the church of Smyrna, giving an account of the martyrdom of Polycarp, evidently refers to the first epistle to the Corinthians, and gives the title of *gospel* to the history of Christ written by the evangelists.

In the history of things in the time of Trajan, during part of whose reign the apostle John was living, Eusebius\* says, "there were many eminent-men who had the first rank in the succession of the apostles; divers of whom travelling abroad,

\* H. E. l. iii. c. 37.



abroad, performed the office of evangelists, being ambitious to preach Christ, and to deliver the scripture of the divine gospels." This affords an argument that at that time the gospels were well known and collected together.

Papias, † who was well acquainted with Polycarp, and probably with John, expressly bears testimony to the gospels of Matthew and Mark, and he quoted the first epistle of Peter, and the first epistle of John.

But the writer of most importance near this period is Justin Martyr. This writer was a native of Palestine, a learned man, and a traveller. He was converted to christianity about the year 133 ; flourished chiefly from the year 140 and afterwards ; and died a martyr, about the year 164. His remaining works are two apologies for Christianity, and a dialogue with Trypho, a jew. In the latter, he gives an account of his conversion from Platonism to Christianity, which he speaks of, as " the only certain and useful philosophy." It is deserving your notice, that his two apologies are addressed to two Roman Emperors, and to the Senate and people of Rome. And these  
Em-

† H. E. l. iii. c. 39.

Emperors are Titus Antoninus the pious, and Marcus Antoninus the philosopher. In these letters *thus* addressed, concerning people scattered through every part of the Roman dominions, are as many quotations from the gospels and epistles, as would of themselves, if all the books of the new Testament were lost, be sufficient to ascertain the facts, and the principal doctrines of Christianity. The gospels he calls "memoirs, or commentaries," "memoirs of the apostles," "Christ's memoirs;" "memoirs of the apostles, and their companions, who have written a history of all things concerning our saviour Jesus Christ." And in his first apology, addressed to the Roman Emperor and his intended successor, with the Senate and all the Roman people, he says, (which is still more to our purpose) \* "On the day which is called the day of the Sun (or Sunday) an assembly is held of all the people in towns or country

\* The importance of this passage in an apology presented A. D. 140, will justify me in giving the original: Και τη τε ηλιε λεγομενη ημερα παντων καλα πολεις η αγρες μερονων επι το αυτο συνελευσις γινεται, και τα απομνημονευματα των αποστολων, η τα συγγραμματα των προφητων αναγινωσκειται μεχρις εγχωρει. εις α παυσαμενε τε αναγινωσκοντες, ο προεστως δια λογε την νθεσιαν και προκλησιν της των καλων τβλων μιμησεως ποιειναι.

JUST. MART. THIRLBII p. 97.



country places, and the memoirs of the apostles are read for a convenient time, and, when the reader has finished, the president in a discourse, gives an admonition and a charge, to the imitation of the same excellent things."

Tatian, who flourished about the year 172, composed a harmony of the four gospels, which is a remarkable attestation to the number of the gospels as being four only.

The churches of Vienne and Lyons in Gaul, wrote an epistle to the churches of Asia and Phrygia, containing a relation of the sufferings of their martyrs, in the time of Marcus Antoninus. They express themselves in the language of St. Luke, and St. John, and the acts of the Apostles, the epistle to the Romans, the Philippians, and some other epistles of St. Paul, the first epistle of St. Peter, the first of St. John, and the Revelations.

Irenæus, bishop of the church of Lyons in Gaul, probably a native of Asia, in his younger days acquainted with Polycarp, who was a disciple of John, besides other things, composed a work against heresies, in five books, in which is a most noble testimony to the scriptures of

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the new testament; for he assures us, there were four gospels received by the church, and no more, which he has often, and largely quoted, with the names of the writers; as also the book of the Acts, which he ascribes to Luke, and twelve epistles of St Paul, most of them, with the names of the churches, or persons, to whom they were sent. He has likewise quoted the first epistle of St. Peter, and the first and second of St. John, and the book of the Revelations, as St. John's, and written in the time of the emperor Domitian; and there are in him many expressions testifying his great regard for these scriptures.

If I thought these testimonies were not sufficient, and that more would be so, I would produce more testimonies, to convince you on what foundation this assertion rests, that "there was no such book as the new testament, till more than three hundred years after the time that Christ is said to have lived."\*

So

\* In the account of Mr. Wakefield's reply to the second part of the Age of Reason, in the Analytical Review for December, 1795, the writer says, "Mr. W. seems here to have mistaken Mr. Paine's meaning: if the whole passage be considered, it will perhaps appear, that Mr. P. refers to the time, when the canon was settled, and the hitherto  
scat-



So much for the testimony of christian writers in the apostolic age, and part of the second century (for we have proceeded no lower) in favour of the genuineness of the books of the new testament. But though we have done with this ground of evidence, there is another circumstance which demands our attention, and on which I presume we may safely rest, and that is, *the existence* of these books. It is an easy matter to talk about forgeries and impositions, and with these words the generality of infidels may find themselves satisfied. But who, that seriously considers the frame and constitution

scattered scriptures, were collected into one volume, or as he afterwards says, when the new testament was formed into a book."

I confess, that on first reading the work, I was inclined to adopt the same opinion; but on more mature reflection, and on considering what *design* such an ambiguity of expression must have implied, whatever I might think of Mr. Paine as a *writer* on the subject of religion, I could not entertain so bad an opinion of him as a *man*. Mr. P. could not have meant that his uninformed readers should put this construction on the passage, and with respect to others, he must have known, that the question, *when the canon of scripture was settled, or when the new testament was formed into a book*, is just as foreign to the purpose of his argument, as *when it was translated, when it was printed, or even when it was bound*.

stitution of the human mind, the state of learning and philosophy at the commencement of christianity; the degrees of knowledge which could be acquired even by the most studious and inquisitive, and particularly the situation and means of improvement of those who must have written these books; and then reads them with impartiality and attention; reflects on their number, magnitude, variety and minuteness of detail; on the principles, doctrines, precepts, facts and examples which they contain; indeed, on their singularity in every part, can conceive the possibility of, a scheme to forge such writings ever entering into the mind of one man, much more of such a number of men; their actually executing this scheme, and their success in imposing their forged works upon the world as genuine? Supposing all this, not only possible, but actually to have taken place, we shall then come to the argument of the author of the age of reason. Let us contemplate it in all its dimensions. It is simply this: *From the contradictions, which he has pointed out, in these forged writings, it appears that christianity is an imposture.* If christianity could have been so easily overturned, the merit of overturning it would not have been reserved for the author of the age of reason, at the close of the eighteenth century.

But



But even if we were to allow all his premises, we should find ourselves no nearer to his conclusion. Forgery supposes Truth; as counterfeit implies reality. Were not the books which we now have genuine, it has been proved that there were genuine books from which they must have been taken; and even if we were to allow, in opposition to this weight of positive and direct evidence, that there were no books written within the three first centuries, or none which are now extant, we are obliged to allow that the *facts* must have been true, to account for the existence of the books *at that period*. The author of the age of reason acknowledges, that "the writers, whoever they were, have not acted in concerted imposition." This circumstance then at once accounts for the real or apparent *inconsistencies* in the books, and I leave him to account for the *agreement*. My friends, it is not the christian, not even the weakest christian, who alone incurs the imputation of credulity and implicit faith. When a positive system of infidelity shall once be exhibited to the world, when the facts shall have been attempted to be accounted for, as they have hitherto been only by Mr. Gibbon, it will then appear, upon the comparison, which system is the more miraculous. It deserves

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particular attention, and this argument is well illustrated by Dr. Priestley in his reply to Mr. Evanson, that *the existence of christianity*, by which I mean, as was before observed, the divine mission of Jesus Christ, his miracles and his resurrection from the dead; and let me add as the most important doctrines of his religion, the unity and goodness of God, and a future state; *does not depend upon the authenticity of any books whatever*, but is supported by *distinct and independant* evidence. As there is a beautiful analogy between natural and revealed religion; as in fact they are the same, the latter only exhibiting clearer light, and more convincing evidence; as the difficulties which affect the one, affect also the other, so the arguments in support of both are drawn from the same source. Indeed allowing only the *perfections of God*, and there appears but little difficulty in proving the truth of christianity: for the arguments against it, when pushed to the utmost length, amount to this, that God cannot possibly give a revelation, or render the doctrine of a future state more credible, than it is, by the light of reason. As every part of the great system of nature; as every animal, plant or leaf; or the smallest  
con-



conceivable part of any animal, plant or leaf, proves the existence of a Deity ; so there are thousands and ten thousands of facts, every one of which stands as an effect without a cause, upon the supposition that Christianity is an imposture. Not only the rapid progress of the Christian religion at first, in *such circumstances* and by *such instruments* ; not only its existence at this day, notwithstanding all the opposition which it has met with ; each of which in the analogy of nature, may be compared to a system of worlds ; but even the conversion of an *individual*, immediately after the death of Christ, which in the analogy of nature may be compared to the existence of any *one* being, is totally and absolutely inexplicable, if the truth of the general history be denied. But to come to a few facts which are deserving of particular attention. For the existence of christianity, the number of its professors, and their sufferings at this early period, we have not only the authority of christian writers, but of enemies. Tacitus, the Roman historian, who was many years contemporay with John, being born A. D. 61. says, that “ in Nero’s days there was a multitude of christians, not only in Judea but in Rome, against whom Nero raised such a persecution

secution as moved the compassion of their enemies :” he says expressly that “ Christ was the author of the Christian name, and that he was put to death by Pontius Pilate the Roman procurator for Tiberius Cæsar.”\* Suetonius likewise expressly mentions the punishments inflicted upon the christians by Nero.†

Pliny the younger, in a letter to the emperor Trajan, on this subject, written about the year 107, says that “ multitudes of both sexes, persons of every rank, were infected with this superstition, which was got into villages, as well as cities, so that till he began to put the laws in execution against them, the temples of the heathen deities were almost deserted.” † Lucian, in a work of his on the death of Peregrinus, written about the year 170, acknowledges that “ the founder of the christian religion was crucified in Palestine ; that those men called christians had strong hopes of immortal life and a great contempt for this world and its enjoyments ; that they courageously endured afflictions on account of their principles ; that honesty prevailed so much among them, that they trusted one another without security,

\* Ann. l. xv. c. 44. † Sueton. Nero. cap 16.

† Lardner's Works, Vol 8, p. 73.



security, and that their master earnestly recommended to them *mutual love*, by which they were much distinguished." The poets \* Martial and † Juvenal, allude to the sufferings of the Christians: the emperor ‡ Marcus Antoninus mentions them as examples of an obstinate contempt of death; § Epictetus speaks of the fortitude with which the Galileans endured torments, and || Galen the celebrated Physician, uses the obstinacy of christians in defending their tenets as a proverbial expression. But of all the writers of the second century, who did not believe christianity, Celsus is the most remarkable. He mentions no spurious books, but allows that the books of the new testament were written by the writers whose names they bear; and from them he makes so many extracts, that all the principal facts in the christian history might be taken from the fragments of his works, as preserved by Origen. He does not pretend to deny the facts, not even the miracles, but labours to account for them on principles of magic; and acknowledges that the Jews, about that period, expected their Messiah. Chrysostom says of him, and of

\* Lib. x. Epigr. 25. † Sat. i. ver. 155. ‡ L. xi. Sect. 3.

§ L. iv. c. 7. || Lardner's works, Vol. 8, p. 91.

Porphyry another adversary of christianity\*,  
 “ they are sufficient witnesses to the antiquity  
 of our books; for I presume they did not oppose  
 writings which have been published since their  
 time.” The Emperor Julian,† an inveterate  
 enemy of the gospel, says expressly that “ Jesus,  
 while he lived did nothing worthy him, except  
 a person suppose that to heal cripples and  
 blind persons and to exorcise demoniacs in the  
 villages Bethsaida and Bethany be great works.”  
 He allows the antiquity of the four gospels,  
 and the acts of the apostles, and so quotes  
 them, as to intimate that they were the *only*  
 authentic books received by the christians as  
 containing the history of Christ and his apostles,  
 and the doctrine preached by them. He allows  
 their early date and even argues for it; he  
 acknowledges there were multitudes of christians  
 in Greece and Italy before St. John wrote his  
 gospel; he confesses that Cornelius the Roman  
 Centurion at Cæsarea, and Sergius Paulus  
 proconsul of Cyprus were converted to the faith  
 of the gospel; though he laboured to overthrow  
 the Christian religion, he has confirmed it:  
 his arguments against it are perfectly harmless,  
 and though he justly excepts to some things

\* Lardner, V. 8, p. 7.      † Lardner, V. 8, p. 410.

then



then introduced into Christianity, he has not made one objection of moment against it as contained in the genuine and authentic books of the new testament

If more testimonies to the truth of the facts be required, they may easily be adduced ; but I fear I have exhausted your patience. The importance of the subject must be my apology.

As I conceived these two grounds of evidence, to be at this time most necessary to be understood, as containing in them a refutation of the assertions of a modern unbeliever, I have been more particular in the explication of them than I shall be of those which remain. With respect to the *completion of prophecies*, a ground of evidence which I doubt not will every day receive accessions of strength : it is not in my power, at present, to enter into so minute a detail as the importance of the subject demands. Those who wish for more complete information, I would refer to Sir Isaac Newtons " observations on the prophecies of Daniel, and the apocalypse of St. John ;" to Lowman " on the revelations," and to bishop Newton's " dissertations on the prophecies." I beg leave however to observe to you, that it is a fact, allowed by Heathen and

Jewish, as well as by Christian writers, that before and during our Saviour's time, the Jews were in expectation of the appearance of an extraordinary person, whom they called their Messiah. The many insurrections of the Jews, under impostors professing themselves to be the Messiah, are a proof of this expectation, which was also common to the Samaritans who had no intercourse with them. The prophecies of the old testament clearly foretel that a \*person would arise, of the family of David,† while the second temple was standing, who would be eminent for the piety, wisdom, and benevolence of his character; that he would perform many wonderful works; that notwithstanding these, he would be rejected by the Jews; that great calamities would be brought on the Jews for rejecting him, and that the kingdom of God would, by his means, be published to the Gentiles, and diffuse itself, even to the ends of the earth, destroying idolatry, wherever it came, and establishing true religion and righteousness. The dispersion and present state of the Jews, is a circumstance which particularly demands your attention, and their preservation as a distinct people is one of the most signal and

\* Isajah ix. 5—7.      † Haggai ii. 6—9.



illustrious acts of divine providence †. The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, which was certainly written several hundred years before the time of Christ, contains so accurate a description of his state, sufferings, and character, that it might be read with advantage as part of his history. The most remarkable prophecy delivered by our Saviour himself, is that on the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, which is incontrovertibly proved to have been recorded *before* that event took place, and is, in every part of it, confirmed by the history of Josephus, a Jew, and an enemy to christianity, *after* the catastrophe. The accelerated progress of the gospel immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem, is a striking illustration of the reality of the prediction. The prophecies concerning Antichrist, which have been supposed to refer exclusively to the church of Rome, (though that is doubtless emphatically described by them), have probably a much more extensive application; and refer, not only to every assumed power of decreeing rites and ceremonies, and authoritatively interfering in matters of faith; but to that general corruption of doctrines, principles and morals, which has so long pre-

† See Newton's Dissertations, Dissert. 8.

vailed among the professors of christianity. Every thing which is contrary to the purity and simplicity of the christian religion, as well as every arrogated right to dictate to the consciences of others, is truly and properly *anti-christian*. How far this description may apply, either to individuals or bodies of men, let them impartially examine and determine for themselves.

Our Saviour's question, "when the son of man cometh shall he find faith on the earth?" compared with St. Paul's declaration to the Thessalonians, that "that day shall not come except there be a *falling away* first," or an apostacy from the faith, is a circumstance of a very peculiar nature: it is a circumstance which, it may safely be asserted, *no impostor ever would have predicted*, and which converts the opposition which is made to the gospel, into a striking argument in its support. The evidence arising from the completion of predicted events, deserves at *this time* to be very seriously attended to, as there is reason to apprehend from the magnitude of causes which are now operating, and which have been looked for by many judicious interpreters of scripture, that great changes will shortly take place in the  
state



state of the world, which will probably be of such a nature as to confirm the credibility of divine revelation, and to produce a conviction of the reality of the prophecies, both of the old and new testament, in every impartial, considerate and well disposed mind.

The *presumptive* and *collateral* evidence in favour of the gospel, opens upon us so wide a field of speculation, that it is impossible to enter into it at present; we can therefore only view it at a distance, and hastily sketch a few of the objects which are indistinctly perceived. The evidence which we have been considering, is chiefly of a *direct* and *positive* nature; the *internal* evidence is derived from the *excellence* of the whole scheme, particularly with reference to its end, the moral and religious improvement, and in consequence of this, the present and future happiness of mankind. All other evidence in favour of divine revelation, may be classed under the head of *presumptive*, or *collateral* evidence. To this head may be referred, what many unbelievers if they would only follow their principles to their legitimate conclusion, would be led to deny, the *possibility* of a divine revelation; and to this head may likewise be referred, the *antecedent probability* of it from the  
per-

perfections of God, and the nature and circumstances of man. Dr. Leland, a writer to whom the cause of revealed religion is under many obligations, has furnished us with two volumes directly on the subject, which are as entertaining as they are useful and instructive; the title of his work is "the advantage and necessity of the christian revelation, shewn from the state of religion in the antient Heathen world, especially with respect to the knowledge of the one true God; a rule of moral duty and a state of future rewards and punishments." The great *importance* of the histories, precepts, promises, threatenings, and prophecies contained in the scripture, another part of the presumptive evidence is given in an admirable account of the whole by Dr. Hartley. The general character of our Saviour, his particular mode of instruction; the life, character and manner of writing of the apostle John; the conversion, apostleship and subsequent conduct of St. Paul, as illustrated by Dr. Duchal in his "Sermons on the presumptive evidence of Christianity," and the last likewise by Lord Lyttelton, are important parts of this class of evidence.

Many excellent arguments are contained and practically illustrated in the "Observations on  
our



our Lord's conduct as a divine Instructor, and on the excellence of his moral character;" by Dr. Newcome, the present Archbishop of Armagh. The conduct of Judas Iscariot, who certainly, if our Saviour had been an impostor must have known it, and in his own defence would have published it, affords in itself a strong presumptive argument of the truth of Christianity. "The manner in which the evidences of the gospel were originally proposed, the advantages of this manner, and the benefit which Christianity has derived from opposition," illustrated in the dissertation of Dr. Gerard, likewise deserve particular attention.

The time, and all the circumstances in which Christianity was introduced into the world; the impossibility of deception in the first converts, and the reasons we have to believe they would not have attempted to deceive others, and the absolute impossibility of success in this attempt, strike the mind with a conviction which is in proportion to its comprehension. The sacrifices which were made by the first christians, and the many other presumptive, as well as positive arguments in favour of Christianity, which are brought forward by Archdeacon Paley in his

two volumes of evidence ; and the many *undesignated coincidences* in the writings of St. Paul, compared with the acts of the Apostles, which he has pointed out in his *Horæ Paulinæ*, constitute a body of evidence which will outweigh all the arguments of the opposers of Christianity, from Celsus to the writers of the present day. In short the presumptive and collateral evidences are of such a nature, so various and so powerful, that if we had no other sufficient proofs of the authenticity of the scriptures ; if we had no direct historical proofs of the truth of the facts ; if we had no prophecies remaining ; we should not want evidence sufficient to convince every impartial and inquisitive mind, that the great facts on which Christianity rests, must actually have taken place, and that the account which we have of these facts in the writings of the new testament, carries with it sufficient credibility.

But the subject, even if we had considered every thing which may be comprehended under the last head, is not exhausted. The *internal* evidence, which all may understand, is of itself a sufficient ground of belief in the divine authority of the christian religion. It deserves particularly to be attended to, that whatever doctrines



doctrines the most enlightened reason may be able to discover, whatever rules of duty it may be able to lay down, whatever motives to the practice of the sublimest virtue it may be able to suggest; all these are included in Christianity. So that nothing can be more inconsistent, than for a real friend of natural religion, one who believes in the existence, perfections and providence of God, and particularly in a future state, to treat the christian religion with contempt. If a person be a friend to the best interests of mankind; if he wish to see every man around him honest, faithful, and sincere; if he wish to see no vice as the cause, and no misery as the effect; if he wish to see radical reforms in civil and religious institutions brought about without any previous evil; if he wish to see *War* and *Slavery* banished from the earth for ever; if he wish to see man, in every instance, the brother and the friend of man, he will wish to be a witness of the general prevalence of Christianity. Let Christianity be but once known, believed, and practised, and all these consequences will ensue. The misfortune has hitherto been (thank God however not without many exceptions), that men have been *nominal* and not *real* christians. A profane, a cruel,

a proud, an ambitious, a covetous man, is not in the true sense of the word, a Christian. The standard of perfection, which was given by Christ, is not to be brought down to the conduct of mankind. Let not the gospel suffer for the faults of its inconsistent professors. Beings endued with *reason* act *irrationally*, and persons favoured with the light of the *gospel* act *contrary* to its injunctions. Let not reason be blamed in the one case—let not Christianity be censured in the other. One good effect of that infidelity which is at present so general, and which, when it does not proceed from worse causes, is often the result of superficial thinking, of a mind affected by, and accustomed to dwell upon trifles, of pride of intellect, and of an incapacity to grasp a *whole*, and which in consequence of these causes will probably increase in such a degree, as to comprehend the *majority*, is, that it will bring professors of faith in Christ to their first principles, and will purify Christianity, both in doctrine and in practice; in other words, it will tend to exhibit the religion of Jesus Christ to the world, in its true light, and to restore it to its native energy and vigour. What is the spirit, what are the precepts, or the moral duties of the gospel? "thou shalt love the  
 Lord



Lord thy God, with all thy heart, soul, and strength, and thy neighbour as thyself."

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." "Blessed are the meek, for they

shall inherit the earth." "Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God." "Whatsoever ye would that

men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them." "God hath not given us the spirit of

fear, but of power, of love and of a sound mind." "Let love be without dissimulation ;

abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good." "Rejoice with them that do rejoice,

and weep with them that weep." "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you live peaceably

with all men." "If thine enemy hunger, feed him, if he thirst, give him drink, for by so doing thou shalt melt him to repentance."

"Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest or honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, lovely and of good report, if there be any praise, and if there be any virtue, think on these things."

"Put on as the elect of God, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering, forbearing one another, forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye ; and

above

above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfection." "Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." "To them who by a patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, honour and immortality, God will give eternal life." These constitute part of the internal evidence of christianity, and I may venture to say that the more they are studied, the more the new testament is read, the more convincing will this evidence appear. On this subject Dr. Toulmin's "Dissertations on the internal evidences and excellence of christianity, and on the character of Christ, compared with that of some other celebrated founders of religion and philosophy," is deserving your attention, as likewise, "Mr. Wakefield's remarks on the internal evidences of the christian religion."

The enlargement on this part of the subject has suggested to me a difficulty to which I beg for one moment to call your attention. It may be asked, Is then a knowledge of the preceding grounds of evidence, and the perusal of all the books which have been mentioned absolutely necessary? I would ask in my turn, necessary  
for



for what? Certainly not for a rational and well-founded belief in Christianity; but as conviction, at present, seems so much more difficult on one side than on the other, it may properly be recommended, for your own security, and to enable you to answer all the objections of infidels. Where the poison has been insinuated, the antidote must be administered; where Christianity has been attacked it must be defended, and certainly with a view of furnishing every person of common ability, with complete armour for this purpose, what has been laid before you is not more than you had a right to expect, though it may be more than is absolutely necessary.

A *sufficient* ground for a belief in the divine origin of the christian religion may be laid before you in few words. *It is the greatest blessing which was ever enjoyed by mankind.* "Every good and perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the father of lights, with whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning."

It was not my intention, in this discourse, to consider the contradictions, which Mr. Paine imagines he has pointed out in the scriptures.

They

They have nothing to do with the subject. Had there been none, that circumstance alone would not have established the truth of christianity, nor would it have made him a believer ; on the contrary, it would have been sufficient to excite a suspicion of collusion. In all writings of the historical kind, and in all accounts given by eye witnesses, these circumstantial inconsistencies will appear. They are in themselves a very strong proof of the truth of the principal facts. In Lucan's Pharsalia, where he is giving a geographical description of Thessaly, he places mount Pelion in the north, which all ancient historians say is in the south, and both he and Virgil have made a geographical mistake in confounding Philippi with Pharsalia. It may not, however, be improper just to mention that with respect to the *hour* of our Lord's crucifixion, the three evangelists who wrote *before* the destruction of Jerusalem used the *Jewish* mode of computation ; and John, who wrote *after* that event, when it would have been unpopular to write as a jew, and probably was no longer done under the Roman government, adopted the mode of computation then in use, and this circumstance renders the accounts perfectly coincident.

The



The facts respecting our Saviour's resurrection, and his different appearances are, I think, harmonized by Mr. West ; but whether they be or not, *the great fact of his resurrection is*, I trust, sufficiently ascertained. To his book on this subject, and to the sermon of Dr. Priestley, I would refer those who wish for more particular information.

Before I conclude, it may not be amiss to give you one sentence on the word *Priest*, which is so liberally used in the publication we have alluded to. If the person last mentioned ; if *dissenting* ministers of any description, and particularly *unitarian* dissenters, besides the general obloquy affixed to their character ; besides their exclusion from the English universities, and from all posts of honour, power and profit ; besides the pecuniary sacrifices which many of them make, are to be treated with odium as *Priests* : they may likewise with equal justice, have the term *soldiers* of Jesus Christ applied to them, as a plea for fixing upon them whatever disapprobation and censure may be supposed to attach to the *military* profession.

So much for testimony, fact and argument. I cannot conclude without one appeal to sentiment. Are we, if we are to give up all belief

in revealed religion, to give up likewise all the finer feelings of the human mind ; all the pleasures of devotion, and all the endearments of social and relative connections, which seem inconsistent with modern systems of infidelity ? Are we to give up all these, and in addition to these, all relish for the sublime, the beautiful and the pathetic, and all the principles of taste in composition ? Are we to believe that there is no sublimity in the Psalms, in Job, in Isaiah and the prophets ; nothing beautiful and pathetic in the history of Joseph ; nothing simple and interesting in the story of Ruth ; are we to read such passages as the following without one tender emotion : *Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be on the vine, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls ; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, and I will joy in the God of my salvation ?* If the religious feelings are to be quite chilled ; if every act which is a natural expression of them, or has a tendency to excite them, is to be denominated superstitious ; if all the tender charities which mingle the sweetest ingredients in the cup of human life are to be deemed a criminal weakness, still—we have, alas ! but few pleasures remaining—



ing—let us preserve the pleasures arising from a refined and cultivated taste. The pleasures arising from a refined and cultivated taste ; every thing that can adorn, dignify, and exalt human nature is connected with Religion.

And have not the *moral* precepts of christianity a just right to the character of superiour excellence ? May we in other writings find as perfect rules for the direction of our conduct in every circumstance of life ? Where ? Oh ! where, professed friend of natural religion, am I to look for this invaluable treasure ? I will not reject it, as you do my rule of duty, but I will press it to my heart, and read it alternately, morning and evening, with my bible !

#### MY BRETHREN,

Whatever may be the fate of the *evidences* of christianity, the *precepts* of christianity, which require the utmost purity of heart and innocence of life, the most diffusive philanthropy, and the most rational and fervent piety, are perfect—they are calculated to promote “peace on earth and good will among men.” Whatever may be thought of the *evidences* of christianity, the *doctrines* of christianity are perfect. They are, that there is one God ; that this God is Love ; that he requires to be worshipped in spirit and in truth ;

truth; that the sole end of his government is the happiness of his creatures; that the present world is a state of probation; that it is the *nursery of minds*, where they are to be trained up to a capacity for everlasting happiness, and finally to be transplanted to a soil, where they will grow and flourish through all the ages of eternity. These are the doctrines of christianity. By some, I know they will be considered as consisting of very few articles. But the greatest distinction which can subsist between one man and another, is that which subsists between the man who firmly believes, and acts upon *these few principles*, and the man who believes them not, and acts upon his system. The time perhaps is fast approaching, when all other distinctions will be lost in this; when men will be divided into those who believe in and fear God, who believe in and obey Christianity, and those who are not of this description. In comparison with this distinction, all other differences among men, are trifles light as air. Let us regard every man who adopts this belief, as a brother. As a brother, indeed, let us regard every individual of the human race, and let us endeavour, with all our might, to make every one a brother by religion, as well as by nature. Let us contend, most earnestly contend, not for the christianity of any particular national establishment,

not



not for the christianity of any particular sect or party, but for the christianity of the new testament. Let us contend, most earnestly contend, for *the faith once delivered to the saints*. Let the only weapons which we make use of in this contest be reason and argument, and, what is of still more commanding influence, a life regulated by the precepts and example of Christ. Let us be not merely speculative, but practical christians. Christianity is a system not so much of speculation, as of practice. Let us shew to all the world, by the purity of our hearts and the active usefulness of our lives, that we *have been with Jesus*, and *have learned of him*. Let us shew by every part of our conduct in our intercourse with mankind, that we are the true followers of that master, whose life was virtue in a human form—the consistent disciples of that teacher, whose first, last lesson to the world was LOVE.

#### F I N I S.

\*\*\* Some of the observations on prophecy, the enlargement on the presumptive and internal evidence, and a few sentences in the body of the Discourse, have been added since the title page was printed off.

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